

February 24, 2016

TO: Local Government House Committee Clerk, Mary Lou Terrien  
RE: House Bill HB 5232

To whom it may concern I am writing to provide my own input and testimony regarding the proposed changes to PA 169 which went into effect almost 50 years ago. As a past long time resident of Cherry Hill in Grand Rapids I can only say that the creation of that historic district provided benefits which far outweigh any and all perceived infringements on "personal property rights". I for one, at no time, felt my property rights were being infringed upon. In fact I feel it had the opposite effect of promoting and enhancing my property right.

Cherry Hill started in the early 1990s as an organized "revitalization project" to help clean up a blighted inner city neighborhood. Crime was extremely high, a local gang ruled the neighborhood and vacant boarded up houses were plentiful. Soon into that revitalization effort process it became evident that the natural thing to do was to pursue becoming a historic district. The reasoning for that decision is in the very term itself- "preservation". Historic district preservation doesn't only preserve the many architectural styles of housing stock it preserves the stability of neighborhoods.

Along with the local historic district status crime was greatly decreased and we no longer had to walk the streets in fear or fear for constant invasion of our properties. That in itself was a huge enhancement to my own "property rights". Along with the historic district status non-caring absentee landlords finally saw the light and homes were soon being sold to smart buyers who were aware of benefits the historic district provided and began restoring the homes to livable condition and obviously greatly increasing their value. Along the way I can't recall one case of a neighbor stating that their property rights were being infringed on or that the system for approval of planned improvements were heavy handed or they were caught off guard by the process. That mind set was alleviated by simply networking how the approval process that exists actually works. It isn't that difficult and Historic Preservation is not a group of "blue haired appointees" intent on enforcing strict guidelines. All you need is a well outlined plan of renovations you intend to make, noting any materials issues up front, outline intended installation processes and inquire upfront about possible options that might be allowed- and proceed accordingly. It's the plan that is the key.

I myself owned two properties with non existent porches long since torn down which I wanted to restore. I drew up my elevation plans based on old photos, outlined projected costs and noted issues I might have with replacing like for like. The main element which entered into it was the duplication of the original turned porch columns, which upon research would have been extremely costly. Upon presenting the plan to historic preservation staff they saw the great benefit of the overall restoration and understood my financial dilemma for that specific part of the plan. After a short review they simply allowed me to use square pillars instead, which greatly decreased cost. The effort was pretty minimal. Those porches stand today and most new neighbors assume they are original and surprised to learn they're only 12 years old.

For me, the private property rights spin that is being presented with this HB 5232 is totally erroneous. PA 169 in its current form works- and has for almost 50 years. It is obvious to me and so many other that this effort is based solely on a small group with deep pockets on a "tear it apart" mission. They are using a handful of dredged up "negative" examples to support their fabricated case. Has anyone thought to ask the thousands of other property owners in historic districts across the state their opinion? I for one just provided mine.

The best analogy I present for this attempt is you don't shoot and gut the horse because it might have a thorn in it's hoof.

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